

By Spc. Allison Churchill

2nd BCT, 4th Inf. Div., PAO

The leaders of 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division family readiness groups attended a workshop on dealing with deployment issues March 23 at the Ironhorse Readiness Center.

The workshop covered handling casualties within a unit, dealing with grief and ensuring surviving family members are aware of the benefits they deserve.

“If the Army does one thing well, it’s take care of families,” said Lee R. Price, chief, casualty operations branch, explaining casualty operations.

Families are notified of casualties in one of two ways, said Price. Cases involving death, duty status whereabouts unknown, missing in action or capture by hostile force require in person notification and appointment of a casualty assistance officer to the primary next-of-kin.

Cases involving the very seriously injured or ill, meaning the Soldier could die within 72 hours, involve a telephone call to PNOK from the commander of a medical facility. If the Soldier has been evacuated to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, as is often the case in the global war on terrorism, and the doctor has deemed it necessary, families can be flown to Germany within 24 hours, said Price.

The families of Soldiers who are seriously injured or ill, have a special category injury (for example, loss of a limb) or are not seriously injured or ill as a result of hostile action will receive a telephone call from either a doctor or someone in the Soldier’s chain of command, said Price.

If a Soldier is injured but can report back to duty he will be offered the chance to call home, said Col. David Hogg, commander, 2nd BCT. He said many Soldiers chose not to call their parents or spouses after minor injuries because they didn't want to worry anyone.

Price and Hogg both stressed the importance of keeping paperwork updated. Soldiers can give detailed instructions on who they want contacted in case of emergency and which survivors they would like to leave specific benefits to, said Price.

Spouses were urged to go over paperwork with their Soldiers so they have a better idea what to expect if the worst happens.

"The more information spouses have, the less stress there is on the Soldier," said Price.

The FRG leaders also learned how to establish a care team to aid families that have received casualty notification.

A care team is a group of volunteers from an FRG that provides help to families in crisis, explained Stephanie Mello, instructor, Army Community Services Soldier and family readiness branch, mobilization and deployment. Services usually include providing child care, transportation or meals, making or taking phone calls or anything else the family may not feel strong enough to tackle.

Mello urged the FRG members to have care teams ready before a crisis.

"There's not enough time when an emergency happens," said Mello.

Not all families will want help from a care team, said Mello. Also, despite what spouses in the rear may have heard from their Soldiers on the frontlines, the care team cannot be mobilized unless the family of a fallen Soldier requests help upon the casualty

notification. If the Soldier himself can contact his family, a team can be mobilized quicker, said Mello.

When training a care team it is important to keep in mind each family will have different needs, said Mello. Team members should also ask themselves “How would I want to be treated?”

Since families dealing with a casualty will suffer tremendous grief, the workshop also included a seminar on grief counseling.

“Don’t ever assume they’re getting well,” said Lt. Col. William C. Shelnut IX, chief, department of ministry and pastoral care.

Shelnutt said everyone goes through grief at a different pace and can sometimes regress to an earlier stage of grief. He said the best thing to help a person in mourning is just to listen and try to help ease the return to normalcy.

“Help people re-establish patterns, especially after the initial outpouring of support ends,” said Shelnut. He said just asking if someone would like to go to the commissary can help.

The FRG leaders had an opportunity to put the day’s lessons to use with a role-playing session led by Kathy Beech, core instructor, Army Family Team Building. Groups discussed how they would handle a variety of situations, including foreign national widows, the death of a spouse in the rear while a Soldier is deployed and news of a casualty reaching the rear before the official notification.

Workshop organizer Marion Gilbert, assistant, 2nd BCT Family Readiness Group, said she was pleased with the sessions.

“There was a need for the knowledge,” said Gilbert. She said she felt the workshop exposed the other FRG leaders to the roles various groups play during emergencies.

Vanessa Flores, leader, Company C, 2nd Battalion, 8th Infantry Family Readiness Group agreed.

“I got a lot of information,” said Flores. “We didn’t a quarter last time the unit deployed that we learned today.”